

to make sure that every Member of this body has an opportunity to vote yea or nay. So I commend the gentleman from Georgia, and I yield back to him.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I thank the gentleman for joining us tonight, and I appreciate your perspective and your commitment to our servicemen and -women and for the sober reflection that you gave on the situation that we find ourselves in today and the importance, the real importance of this war. And it is a real war. It is a real war, and you know and understand that as well as anybody.

I also appreciate your reminding folks again that on Thursday we will be spending time on this floor discussing the war on terror and the importance of it and why America has found itself in this situation, why it is important that we respond in the way that we have.

When I am at home, I hear people talk about the war in Iraq. And whenever I discuss this with some of my constituents, I oftentimes will say it is important for us to remember that this war in Iraq is really just the battle in Iraq in the larger war on terror. And the gentleman from Georgia just described it extremely well, that the policy of containment that we had used in the past, prior to 9/11, was a dismal failure. And so this is truly a war. It is a real war. It is a real war in which we must engage, and it wasn't of our choosing. It wasn't of our choosing, Mr. Speaker.

I want to spend the final few moments that I have to talk about an issue that is related to the war on terror and the battle in Iraq that we have right now, because you hear so many people say, how are we going to know when it is over? How are we going to know what victory is? How will we know when we win?

It is difficult. I understand that. It is difficult because this, again, is a war unlike any war we have ever had. Victory in Iraq will not come in the form of our enemy surrendering, because our enemy doesn't hold any territory. It is not like they can say, okay, I give up, I am not going to fight any more. And it won't be signaled by a single particular event.

For folks who remember past wars and past ends to past wars, there will be no Battleship *Missouri* signing. There will be no Appomattox signing. The ultimate victory in the battle in Iraq will be in stages. And I think it is important to point out that these stages have been defined by members of the military and members of this administration and have been articulated by the administration as well as members of the United States House of Representatives leadership and others.

□ 2315

And they have been defined in the short term, in the medium term and in the long term. I would like to run through those briefly because I think it

is important for the American people to appreciate that yes, indeed, there are benchmarks that one can follow, and that we have made incredible progress, not just in the war on terror but in the battle in Iraq.

In the short term, we have an Iraq that is fighting the terrorists and neutralizing the insurgency, meeting political milestones, which they have done to a remarkable degree, building democratic institutions and standing up robust security forces. We hear over and over that those security forces number around 250,000, which is truly remarkable. They are destroying terrorist networks and maintaining security and tackling key economic reforms to lay the foundation for a sound economy.

So in the short term, those are the kinds of benchmarks that we should be looking at. Many of them have been accomplished.

In the medium term, an Iraq that is in the lead defeating terrorists and insurgents and providing its own security with a constitutional, elected government in place. Mr. Speaker, that is a medium-term goal that has been described for a number of years and in fact has now been accomplished, providing an inspiring example to reformers in the region, and well on its way to achieving its own economic potential.

And then in the longer term, Mr. Speaker, we will know that victory in Iraq has been obtained when an Iraq has defeated the terrorists and neutralized the insurgency, an Iraq that is peaceful and united and stable and democratic and secure where Iraqis have the institutions and resources that they need to govern themselves justly and to provide security for their own country, and an Iraq that is a partner, a partner in the global war on terror and the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, integrated into the international community and an engine for regional economic growth and proving the fruits of democratic governments to the region.

Mr. Speaker, those are the kinds of benchmarks we ought to be looking at. There won't be a surrender. There won't be a signing. There won't be a waving of the white flag certainly by our enemy. We just hope Members in this body and across the Nation do not wave the white flag. This is an important battle. It is a part of the war on terror. It is imperative that we wage this with the vigor and enthusiasm and the spirit that we saw on the faces and heard in the voices of American soldiers as they greeted President Bush as he made his visit to Baghdad.

Mr. Speaker, America is a wondrous and a glorious nation. Freedom's light is strong here. We are a vessel of liberty and a beacon of hope to so many people around the world. The work that we do here is so important as we continue to provide that American leadership, international leadership, and show that light, show that light of freedom.

I am so proud to have the opportunity to stand here with my colleagues and to highlight some of the truthful and honest efforts that this government, this administration, this House of Representatives is taking to make certain that that vessel of liberty and that beacon of hope rings true around the world.

#### CROSSROADS IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MACK). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) is recognized for the remaining time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, tonight I wish to speak about Iraq, a separate and distinct war from the war on terrorism. Those who are terrorists with their genesis in Afghanistan have a goal of creating a fundamentalist Muslim caliphate all across the Middle East. The insurgents are Baathists and Sunnis in Iraq who have as their goal a separate and distinct one of toppling the government that is there and creating their own.

My friends on the other side of the aisle wish to confuse the battle against terrorists and the battle against insurgents in the country of Iraq. Tonight I wish to speak about Iraq because we are at a strategic crossroads as a Nation regarding that war.

I wish to speak about the health of our military that is being drained by the war in Iraq. As a matter of fact, we are sustaining a battalion's worth of casualties every month wounded and killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The number of attacks on the American and allied forces is at the highest level since the insurgency began despite the increase of America combat operations and the introduction of some 40 new Iraq security forces and battalions.

An ABC poll shows that 60 percent of Americans disapprove of the situation in Iraq. What is responsible for us arriving at this point? I have to say a lot of good words about our military, the finest we have ever had, they are doing a superb job. I am proud of them, and every American should be. But there have been operational strategic mistakes sadly made by the administration that has brought us to this point at a crossroads in Iraq.

First, allowing the looting; second, not having a plan for the aftermath, although duly warned; by dismissing the Iraqi Army rather than giving them a paycheck and a shovel; failure to plan and have American civilian professionals from the State Department, Transportation Department, Agriculture Department, and Judiciary with the right skills to advise the Iraqis when they took over their governmental ministries; the failure to react to the wartime collapse of the Iraqi military and security police forces; and the decision to disband the Army, as I mentioned; failure to have a

sufficient number of American troops at the beginning and later as General Eric Shinseki warned.

This is a year of transition in Iraq. The bill that we passed last year, the defense bill, stated that calendar year 2006 should be a period of time of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty with Iraqi security forces taking the lead for the security of a free and sovereign Iraq, thereby creating the conditions for the phased redeployment of the United States forces from Iraq.

If we are not able to redeploy our forces from Iraq, the health of our military will be seriously endangered. We are wearing the troops out. Not just the troops, but the equipment. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, 13,849 members of the selected reserves have had three deployments, and 10,408 have been deployed more than three times. Well, where do we go from here?

We have to do our best to train those Iraqis, let them and their government know that the ball is in their court. We have to make sure they are properly equipped, and I might also say that the equipment of the Army and Marines Corps ground equipment is wearing out. Some of it is wearing out from two to nine times the peacetime rate.

We have global interests, potential threats from elsewhere, North Korea, Iran, Taiwan Straits and the like. We must be prepared for any future threat. That is why it is important that this be a transition year, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MEEHAN).

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding and I want to commend his efforts as the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee for making sure, as other Democratic members have, that the men and women who serve this country get the equipment that they need to succeed. Many of us were stunned to see so many of our men and women put into harm's way without having enough uploaded Humvees and Kevlar vests.

I also want to acknowledge the gentleman for considering the casualties that we are taking. I believe the gentleman said a battalion per month. A battalion per month.

What effect is this going to have on the long-term implications for national security and our military? One of the things a country has to do in a time of war is tell the truth about what is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet the administration continues to think that the American people cannot handle the truth or do not want the truth. We experience setbacks. We have strategies that do not work. They continue to tell us we should stay the course and everything will be all right. We have no accountability on the part of the Congress, either the House or the Senate, to hold the administration accountable for what their policies are or aren't.

Members of the Armed Services Committee tonight, Democrats on that

committee that have served on the committee traveled, I think every Democrat has been to Iraq at least twice, will follow me and tell you that the administration is simply not being candid, honest and truthful with the American people about the situation in Iraq. As Mr. SKELTON indicated, we went into Iraq without enough troops. General Shinseki told us we were going to need a few hundred thousand troops. What did they do at the Pentagon, they put him out to pasture as if he did not know what he was talking about.

The reality is that the situation in Iraq is deteriorating. Mr. SKELTON talked about the insurgency in Iraq. Ninety to 93 percent of the insurgents in Iraq are from within Iraq. There is an outside group of somewhere between 8 and 10 percent terrorists that have come over the border. It makes you wonder why the President said to every terrorist in the world, Bring it on. Bring it on.

There are more attacks today in Iraq by the insurgency than ever. The situation is growing worse because the insurgency is growing stronger. Sectarian violence is becoming more common, and violent crime is on the rise. I am not just saying these things, the facts support these things. Despite the claim that the available combat power of the Iraqi security forces is increasing and the operational tempo has significantly stepped up, violent insurgent attacks have increased every month this year. That is a fact.

Violent crime in Baghdad is at its highest level since August 2003. That is a fact.

Insurgent attacks have increased every month this year, and that is a fact. But we keep hearing about how things are getting better. Insurgency is as large today as it has been at any point in Iraq. That is a fact.

The administration has been stressing to us that reconstruction is going well and that progress is being made, and certainly in some parts of the country that is true. But you cannot look at the totality of the circumstances and say that the administration is being honest or truthful with the American people.

While we debate here tonight, residents of Baghdad receive 3.9 hours of electricity per day. Let me repeat that: 3.9 hours of electricity per day. So it is great that those satellite dishes are up, but people are unable to use them. Before the war, people in Baghdad could depend on 16 to 24 hours a day of electricity, and this past month, it is only 17 to 20 percent of the prewar output.

It is really hard to focus on democratization when you live by candlelight and cannot store your food. Drinking water is not readily available either. Back in 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority stated that the goal was to have 23 million of the 26 million Iraqis with access to potable water.

□ 2330

Do you know where we stand today in that goal? Just a little over 8 mil-

lion Iraqis have safe access to drinking water. This is significantly lower than pre-war levels and about a third of what the CPA was aiming at. We have failed to do our jobs in terms of providing electricity, providing the water, providing the economic development, providing jobs. Any country in the world with a 40 percent unemployment rate is going to have an insurgency.

Now, maybe the administration could point to success in building a train station, but we can't have success without providing the necessities of life. So the administration talks about how much safer things are. But the reality is, if you look at the facts, you see that staying the course is just not an option for the United States. We have to look at the facts. We have to look at the fact that the challenges in Iraq are growing every day. Our military is stretched to the limits. 20,000 Americans, brave American soldiers have either been injured, seriously injured, or have been killed. So what we would like is a debate on Iraq, not some kind of political statement that merges Iraq with Afghanistan, with Spain, with London, and put it all together and call it the war on terror and say we support our troops. We all want to win the war on terror. We all want to make sure that we support our troops. But we really ought to have a discussion of what is going on in Iraq. And there are members of the Armed Services Committee who have been trying to get that discussion, trying to get that accountability who are here today. And I want to yield to the gentlewoman from California to continue this discussion.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I think many of us find ourselves deeply distressed that we are here to talk about a so-called week about the war on terrorism when we were promised months ago by the majority leader a debate on Iraq.

There is a convergence here of themes that have been deeply disappointing to me for well over the last 2 years, as I saw the administration begin to use terms like the "global war on terror" to begin to cover for what has clearly been a mistake in Iraq. I am here tonight because I believe it is high time for a change of direction in Iraq.

I honor the sacrifice of our fighting men and women and their families. With 2,498 American deaths in Iraq today since the beginning of the military operations, it is time that the Bush administration finally levels with the American people. I think we first have to go back to where, the beginning, to when, after the September 11 attacks and after this House, Democrats, Republicans, along with the Senate and the American people, agreed that we had to topple the government, the Taliban government in Afghanistan that had harbored the al Qaeda terrorists that had attacked us on September 11.

And after we took that government out and began to move that operation

toward, hopefully, a successful Afghanistan, we began to hear the drumbeat of talk out of the administration that Iraq was a big threat to us, that we had mushroom clouds in our future, that this was a country with a leader in Saddam Hussein who was an imminent threat to the United States. Many of us in the post-September 11 time believed that we had to do something more than just fly flights over Iraq and deal with those issues that we had to really move and to do things to create the kind of coalition of not only the willing but the capable that we had when George Bush's father went after Saddam Hussein in the first gulf war.

The real issue right now is what have we done in Iraq to make sure that we can actually succeed. And I think that what we have, unfortunately, has been a number of mistakes by the civilian leadership in the Pentagon. We have heard them all before. The litany is long and getting longer. It begins with not really understanding the context of Iraq. It begins with not really understanding that we needed more troops on the ground after we took Saddam Hussein's government down than we actually need to do the taking down of the government.

It began with not really understanding the context and the construct of those, the sects in Iraq and the enmity and the fear and the kind of reprisals that you would see if the Sunni minority that had been in power during the Saddam time actually had the Shia come back into power and realized how badly they had been treated for 25 years. We have had multiple governments in Iraq, and this mission has morphed and constantly been redefined by the administration to fit the latest catastrophe.

What I really hope we can do over the next few days is have a Democratic position begin to emerge. Our friends on the other side like to talk about truth. And Daniel Patrick Moynihan did have that great saying about people can have their own opinion, but they can't have their own set of facts. Well, my grandmother from Ireland used to tell me that saying it doesn't make it so. And what is really clear is that we have to have a movement forward by this administration to not only admit the mistakes that have been made, but to be sure that we actually can bring our troops home sooner and safer. We want to honor the sacrifice of our troops, but at the same time we want to bring them home sooner and safer.

I am happy to yield to my colleague from New Jersey who is going to continue this conversation, Mr. ANDREWS.

Mr. ANDREWS. I thank my friend for yielding. The job of the American troops in Iraq is to fight for the cause for which we have sent them to fight, and they are doing an honorable and brave and magnificent job; and we are all proud of them and we all support them. The job of the President, as the leader of the executive branch and the Commander in Chief is to make policy

decisions as to how and where to use those forces. And we have grave doubts about whether he has made the right decisions in Iraq. In fact, the record shows he has made a series of poor decisions that put the country in great trouble.

But the job of the Congress is to oversee and ask the questions as to whether the policymakers in the executive branch, from the President on down, are doing the job that we want them to do. This Congress, this majority in Congress has failed to do that job, has failed to ask the questions that need to be asked:

Why did the Pentagon ignore the advice of the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Shinseki, and send fewer than half the number of troops that he recommended? Why did the administration ignore the advice of their own State Department experts and immediately disband the Baathist Party, the whole thing? Why did they further ignore the advice of those experts and disband the Iraqi Army, the whole thing?

Why did they not guard the ammo dumps that are now providing the fire power that is making IEDs that are killing Americans every day? Why did they not properly set up supervision of the prisons so that we have the national scandal of Abu Ghraib and the grave damage it has done to the reputation of this country around the world?

And I think the central question that vexes us tonight is why have we still not organized our intelligence functions on the ground such that we can't predict and stop the actions of maybe 25,000 people in a country of 24 million people? Why is it that the resistance is always a step ahead, that the ability to stop them is a rare occurrence? The fact of the matter is the Congress hasn't done the job that it needs to do because the majority is serving as a rubber stamp for the policies of the administration, rather than as a coequal branch asking the tough questions that ought to be asked.

Let's start with these: Do we have the intelligence forces on the ground to figure out where the resistance fighters are, who the resistance fighters are, and what they might do next? Have we reached out to our allies in the Arab and Muslim world who deal with this problem on a daily basis to get the best of their practices and the best of their advice? The numbers of Iraqi forces, we were told before the 2004 election in this country, that several hundred Iraqi security forces were trained and ready to step up and defend their own country. Rather than growing, it seems that number is shrinking. It dropped precipitously after the 2004 election in this country. It has never been predictable. It has never been stable. It has never been measurable.

The job of the Congress is to ask the hard questions and come up with the right answers. But if you deny the fact that the questions have to be asked, as

the majority has, you will never come up with the right answers. You will lose the faith of the American people, and you will undercut the mission of those in the field. We support, respect, and admire the efforts of those in the field. That is why we should be asking the hard questions.

I would like to yield to my friend from California who is not only asking good questions but providing some of the answers, my friend Mrs. DAVIS.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. I want to raise an issue that I think has really not gotten a lot of attention, and that is the fact that our troops have been asked to play roles that they really didn't train for. One moment our troops are being asked to work with civilians in Iraq and with the local governments. They are being asked to teach them negotiating skills. And then in the next minute, they are being asked to go outside and control the chaos that is swarming in the streets. Well, you know what? We know that our soldiers have answered these calls, and they do it better than anyone could have ever expected them to. But the fact that they have had to perform these different roles is disturbing evidence of the way the President and his civilian leaders have planned so poorly for this war and the aftermath that we are still in today.

But don't listen to me. Listen to General McCaffrey who has made numerous trips to Iraq and to Afghanistan and he has publicly stated that that critical interagency coordination that was really important to get the kind of provincial reconstruction themes are just beginning to emerge now up and running. What disturbs me is not just the fact that our military has been asked to perform those tasks; but in the place of people who should have been performing those tasks, we have very inexperienced and young individuals who really have never played that role before.

So just now we see some changes; we see that they are trying to put together the right Foreign Service officers in the field. Even today, Secretary Rice said she is still struggling to do that in many cases. What was needed was a plan for post-occupation Iraq that honored the sacrifices of our troops. And instead they have been given this burden unnecessarily and at great cost.

I join in applauding my colleagues, as we all are, trying to raise the facts and the realities of Iraq today. And I yield to Mr. SKELTON.

Mr. SKELTON. I thank the gentlewoman from California. This is the year of transition. It is up to the Iraqi people. It is up to the Iraqi Government. It is up to the Iraqi forces. They are going to have to take it upon themselves with the assistance of the wonderful Americans that are there to make this transition work.

I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas, Dr. SNYDER.

Mr. SNYDER. Last week, Mr. Speaker, all 28 Democrats of the House

Armed Services Committee signed a letter to Chairman DUNCAN HUNTER asking for the reinstatement of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. Now why do we do this? Because 10 years ago when the Republicans took over control of Congress that subcommittee on the House Armed Services Committee was eliminated and the intent was that oversight, bipartisan oversight was to be conducted by the other subcommittees. That has been a failure and we have seen that as members of this committee, some of us for almost a decade now. It has been a failure particularly during this time that our Nation is at war.

Our troops deserve the kind of effective government oversight that they deserve. So what are we talking about? We have had corruption, we have had fraud, we have had gross mismanagement; and it undermines the war in Iraq. Anthony Cordesman, the noted expert from CSIS, concluded that we have wasted about half of the \$22 billion of U.S. funds that have been spent so far in reconstruction, and much of the \$34.6 billion of Iraqi funds. The Special Inspector General for Iraq reconstruction concluded that "corruption is another form of insurgency in Iraq." So what are we talking about? We have spent about \$1.8 billion on electricity reconstruction projects, but the pre-war capacity has not yet been reached for electricity generation.

We have spent \$650 million of USAID money on oil production infrastructure, but we still have not reached the pre-war level production capacity. We have spent about \$690 million of U.S. dollars on water and sanitation projects in Iraq, and yet the percentage of Iraqis with access to drinkable water has fallen to 32 percent from the pre-war level of 50 percent, and the percentage of Iraqis with access to sewer and sanitation has dropped from 24 percent to 20 percent.

Here is the problem: our troops are dying and bleeding to give the Iraqi people a chance to do well for themselves and their family, to have drinkable water, to have a safe place to raise children, to have the kind of electricity and the kind of things they need for modern civilization. And yet, because of the inadequacies of the way the administration is conducting the war and monitoring the payments of these monies, that work is not getting done and the Democrats on the House Arms Services Committee are saying tonight we have got to do better.

I would now like to yield to Mr. RICK LARSEN from the State of Washington, also a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. I rise today as we reexamine why Congress and the administration diverted attention from our fight against terrorists and terrorism in order to invade Iraq.

□ 2345

The current administration has gotten too many things wrong in Iraq and

has totally misinterpreted the lessons of the post-9/11 world. It is up to Democrats to get things right in Iraq so we can refocus our military efforts to fighting terrorists around the world who want to harm us.

Today I ask my colleagues: Will we realistically confront terrorists and terrorism with all the elements of our national power, or will we continue to ignore a proven approach to follow a shop-worn, idealistic approach that drains our military of its resources and America of its good will with the very partners that we need to fight terrorism? That is the choice our country faces.

The administration has made countless mistakes since the start of the war in Iraq. As Congress looks to clean up the mistakes that have been made, Democrats must speak out against this administration's tendency to overlook problems and instead push for a policy that centers on oversight of U.S. taxpayer dollars. We must respond to the public's frustrations by creating a secure future for our military and reestablish a foundation for American efforts to fight terrorists and terrorism around the globe.

We can only do that by confronting and repairing the waste, fraud, and abuse that plagues our efforts in Iraq. We need to emphasize that our commitment to U.S. taxpayers is equally as important as the commitment we have made to the Iraqi people.

I ask the American people to consider the legacy this administration has handed us in the defense budget as we spend billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars without the tools and ability to track these dollars. Will we tolerate the squeeze that will force choices between weapons and warriors because of a lack of administration foresight and lack of congressional oversight? I believe the answer is no.

We must consider the legacy of waste, fraud, and abuse in Iraq. Why are we not getting results for our taxpayer dollars? We do not know because the institution endowed by the Constitution that is responsible for protecting your taxpayer dollars is practicing overlook instead of oversight. Parents who are monitoring their children on the Internet are providing more oversight than the United States Congress.

We learn of events and stories through the media once the waste, fraud, or abuses have reached comic proportions. We know that Halliburton has overcharged both the U.S. Government and the Development Fund for Iraq by over \$260 million. The Department of Justice brought criminal indictments against a former CPA contracting official and a contractor for a series of frauds costing taxpayers \$13 million, and the CPA lost control of \$19.6 billion in Iraqi oil funds.

As Congress overlooks expenditures of billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars in Iraq, it ignores responsibility to provide a secure future for our military.

Just in closing, I join my colleagues in commending our U.S. military working in conjunction with Iraqi security and Iraqis themselves for locating and eliminating Abu Musad al-Zarqawi. His terrorist violence is gone. But we have learned in Iraq that fighting a "classic guerrilla-type war" means that a victory like killing Zarqawi cannot be celebrated too long. Much remains to be done in Iraq, and Democrats have to make right where the administration has gone wrong. Our obligations compel us to ask the tough questions that are currently ignored.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, at this time I yield to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER).

Mr. COOPER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the gentleman from Missouri, for yielding.

This is a very, very important subject. We, the members of the House Armed Services Committee, support our troops and we are for victory in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in the global war on terror. We welcome the recent good news. We are glad that they took out Zarqawi. But there is more work to be done.

I also serve on the House Committee on the Budget. I am particularly interested that we pay for this war, that we do not borrow the money to support our troops from China and Iran and nations like that because those nations are increasingly large creditors of our country at a crucial time when we do face a global war on terror.

And where are we getting so much of this money to fund this war? From foreign nations. Where are the war bonds for this war? Where are we borrowing from our own people to pay for this war? What are we paying with for our troops? It is simply not being done by this administration.

But I am joined tonight by two outstanding military veterans who are also members of the House Armed Services Committee. First to speak is the gentleman from Texas, Mr. SOLOMON ORTIZ, who has got terrific experience not only in the military but in preparing our troops for war.

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you so much, JIM.

Tonight we want to begin an honest discussion about where this Nation stands in the war that we are prosecuting. And I think that we owe this to the young men and women whose lives are on the line each day, their families, their futures.

Supporting the troops has got to mean more than bumper stickers on pickup trucks, my friends. We need to give them what they need. You know, it wasn't too long ago when my good friend Congressman REYES and I and about eight other bipartisan Members took a trip to visit 25 military bases around this country. In 4 days we visited 25 bases that were in deplorable condition. We were here in this facility on 9/11 having a press conference to let the American people know where we stood and the conditions of the bases that we inspected, the infrastructure.

A few minutes after that, a plane struck the Pentagon. We never were able to give the American people the conditions of the military bases.

I have been to Afghanistan, and I have been to Iraq. But nobody has been to Iraq more than my good friend Congressman REYES. And I would like for him to give us an assessment. He is a veteran. He has been to Iraq more than any other Member. My friends, let us be honest with the American people and tell the American people what we need to do.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, tonight we start what I hope is the first of a series of honest discussions with the American people, something we have been unable to do up to now.

There are a number of issues, a number of problems with where we find ourselves as a Nation tonight. One of the biggest problems is we have not shared the sacrifice.

As we speak here tonight, 2,498 of our Nation's finest have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan; 18,000 have been wounded with over 8,500 unable to return back to duty.

Do we honor and revere our troops? Absolutely. Do we respect and honor the sacrifices that their families have made and are making? Absolutely. Are we concerned about those that are yet to fall, those that are yet to come back with wounds? Absolutely.

Part of the debate that we want to have on this particular issue is to make sure that we do not debate other auxiliary things except Iraq. Iraq is the area, ground zero, for the kinds of issues that we are dealing with, the kinds of things that my colleagues have spoken about tonight. The kinds of things we have failed to do as a Congress in exercising our oversight responsibilities.

I have been to Iraq six times, to Afghanistan 12. I have visited with our troops. I have seen them. I have shared the environment that they share. As a veteran who served 13 months in Vietnam, which seems like in a different era, I can relate to the kinds of things that are going on in the theater of combat. But the one thing that has been missing for us, in my opinion, has been the ability of this Congress to hold the administration accountable, to do the oversight that is necessary and so vitally important. That is the debate that we want to have on this very important topic.

So with that, my good friend and colleague, a member of the Armed Services Committee, Congressman UDALL, will now speak.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I know the hour draws near, and we have to conclude the day's business. And I want to join my colleagues from across the country who serve with me on the Armed Services Committee to make the point that this is just the beginning of this discussion. We have not had time tonight to talk about recruiting and retention and the developments that have occurred in those

areas. We have not talked about equipment and the need to replenish the equipment that not only the active duty force is using and leaving behind but the National Guard as well.

I know my colleague Mr. COOPER from Tennessee hears, as I do, from returning soldiers and marines about all the equipment that is not coming home that would be available in my part of the country to fight fires and respond to natural disasters, to help on our border in the southern regions. Just recently I had a chance to visit with the Marine Corps leadership; and if I am not mistaken, the number that they shared with me that is necessary to replenish all the equipment that the Marine Corps is leaving behind is on the order of \$5 billion, a very significant number.

So I know we want to leave a little bit of time for Mr. SPRATT and Mr. SKELTON to conclude, but I hope that this discussion will continue, particularly that we can focus on the real changes we face when it comes to retention and recruiting; and I know my good friend Mr. SKELTON is well aware of this in the part of our country in the Midwest.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Victory in Iraq is of primary importance. But it is really up to the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi security forces, and the Iraqi people. We are and we have been doing and, of course, we will continue to be of great assistance. The primary importance is that the Iraqis assume more and more of their own security and of their own destiny.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT).

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. SKELTON for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, the mission in Iraq has been plagued from the start by poor intelligence, by poor planning for the post-war, and by disdain for the advice from our allies and even our officials. Ignoring the Army's Chief of Staff, the Secretary of Defense deployed too few troops, failing to foresee the insurgency that followed the war. Many of those deployed were not properly equipped with body armor or armored vehicles, forced to improvise in the field. The troops were assigned duty that they were not trained for. But let me add here they have performed magnificently. They rose to the challenge. They showed they still have that GI genius for field expedience. They improvised.

But the lack of planning and the lack of preparation has cost us dearly; 2,514 Americans have paid the ultimate price; they have died. 17,774 have been seriously wounded.

Since this is the end of the debate, let me go to the bottom line. First of all, let me say the most important cost we have incurred is for the precious lives that were lost, 2,514; 1,774 who were wounded. But the costs also are considerable. They are not a deter-

minant, obviously. We have troops in the field and are unstinting in our support of them. But when the costs run into hundreds of billions of dollars, they have to be considered.

Here is what the cost of the first Persian gulf war was: \$61 billion. Of that our allies chipped in in kind \$10.6 billion, in cash \$48 billion. The total cost to the United States out of pocket was \$2.1 billion. That is what happens when you form a real coalition and have allies and do not go it alone.

Here is what happens when you go it alone. This has been the ascending cost of the war in Iraq, Iraqi Freedom: starting out at \$51 billion, it rose to \$77 billion in 2004, to \$87 billion in 2005, and to \$100.4 billion this year, the estimated cost. And here is what the cost per month is: \$8.4 billion. That is what the current cost works out to. That is a burn rate in Pentagon jargon; \$8.4 billion a month is the cost of the war currently.

Finally, adding all of that up, through the year 2006, you can see that the cost of Operation Iraqi Freedom has been \$318.5 billion. The cost is not the determinant. We can afford whatever it takes to defend this country. We want to be, as I said, unstinting in support of our troops. But when the cost gets to be \$318 billion, \$8.4 billion a month, it has to be a consideration. And that is similarly what we are saying tonight.

The President spoke several weeks ago and said that probably his successor in 2010 would be the person who decides whether or not and when American troops would be redeployed. He did not even mention the cost of the current undertaking. It is not just a dollar cost. It is an opportunity cost. For every dollar consumed here is a loss of dollars otherwise that could be spent on modernization and on the transformation of our forces.

Last year when we passed the Defense Authorization Act for 2006, the House and Senate, and the President by signing the bill, enacted a provision that 2006 would be the year of transition, when Iraqi troops would begin to take primary responsibility.

This is simply what we are calling on the President to do, to begin moving us in that direction as we resolved we should have done last year, particularly in view of the cost.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Speaker for allowing us to speak tonight. This is a very, very important debate.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. MANZULLO (at the request of Mr. BOEHNER) for today and June 12 on account of wife's surgery.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California (at the request of Mr. BOEHNER) for June 12 on account of a travel delay due to a mechanical malfunction.